



Schools Forum

Thursday 26 February 2026 at 6.00 pm

This will be undertaken as an online virtual meeting

The press and public are welcome to attend this online virtual meeting by viewing the live webcast which it will be possible to access [HERE](#)

Membership

Representing

SCHOOL MEMBERS

Nursery

Nisha Lingam
Angela Turner

Head
Governor

Primary

Siobhan Ali
Michelle Ginty
Melissa Loosemoore
Raphael Moss
Vacancy
Vacancy
Michael Odumosu
Ernest Toquie

Head
Head
Head
Head
Governor
Governor
Governor
Governor

Secondary

Vacancy

Head (Maintained)

Special Education Needs

Nick Cooper

Head

Pupil Referral Unit

Ranjna Shiyani Head

ACADEMY MEMBERS**Primary**

Vacancy Head
Jo Jhally Governor

Secondary

Andy Prindiville Head (Vice-Chair)
Jude Enright Head
Martin Beard Governor
Mike Heiser (Chair) Governor
Mahendra Negi Governor
Vacancy Governor

Special Education Needs

Jayne Jardine Head

NON –SCHOOL MEMBERS**Early Years PVI**

Paul Russell
Wioletta Bura

Trade Union

Lucy Cox/Jennifer Cooper

16-19 Provider Representative

Vacancy

For further information contact: Abby Shinhmar, Governance Officer
Email: abby.shinhmar@brent.gov.uk

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Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also significant enough to affect your judgement of a public interest and either it affects a financial position or relates to a regulatory matter then after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect of expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences**- Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

- (a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:
 - To which you are appointed by the council;
 - which exercises functions of a public nature;
 - which is directed is to charitable purposes;
 - whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party or trade union).
- (b) The interests of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

Or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who is the subject of a registrable personal interest.

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Item	Page
1 Apologies for Absence and Membership	
2 Declarations of Interest	
3 Deputations (if Any)	
4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting	1 - 8
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 26 January 2026 as a correct record.	
5 Actions Arising	
To consider any actions arising from previous meetings.	
6 DSG High Needs Block Budgets 2026-27	9 - 20
This report informs Schools Forum of the detailed HNB budgets for adoption in 2026/27.	
7 DSG Deficit Management Plan February 2026	21 - 28
This report provides a further update on progress to date against the DSG Management Plan aimed at supporting a reduction in expenditure against the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) at a sustainable level.	
8 Any Other Urgent Business	
9 Dates of Future Meetings	
Members are asked to note that a provisional schedule of dates for meetings of the Forum during the 2025-26 Municipal Year will be circulated once the Council's draft calendar of meetings has been finalised.	



MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Held as an online meeting on Monday 26 January 2026 at 6:00pm

Membership

Representing

PRESENT (all in remote attendance):

Governors

Martin Beard
Michael Odumosu
Jo Jhally

Headteachers

Raphael Moss
Andy Prindiville (Vice Chair in Chair)
Ranjna Shiyani
Jude Enright

Non School Members

Councillors

Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for
Children's Services, Education &
Employment

Trade Union

Lucy Cox

Officers

Shirley Parks, Director Education,
Partnerships and Strategy
Gareth Drawmer, Head of Education
and Learning
Sasi Srinivasan, Early Years Manager
Folake Olufeko, Head of Finance
Pallavi Shah, Senior Finance Analyst
Abby Shinhmar, Governance Team

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Jayne Jardine, Ernest Toquie, Nick Cooper, Michelle Ginty, Paul Russell and Melissa Loosemore. As apologies had also been received from Mike Heiser (Chair) Andy Prindiville (as Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 11 November 2025 as a correct record.

5. **Actions arising**

None.

6. **Schools Forum Update Forward Plan**

The Forum **RESOLVED** to note the updated Forward Plan.

7. **DSG Schools Block Budget 2026/27**

Folake Olufeko (Head of Finance, Brent Council) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development which set out the proposed DSG Schools Budget for 2026/27 for consultation and agreement by Schools Forum ahead of the Council budget being set and approved by Full Council in February 2026. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- The DFE has announced the Local Authority funding for Brent as £452m for the next financial year across all funding blocks and including the in-year additional grants.
- The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed school funding increases for 2026/27 based on updated pupil data and formulae assumptions and integrating existing additional grants received within the current financial year, such as the Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and National Insurance Contributions (NIC) grant into the NFF. Brent's confirmed DSG allocation was £452m.
- Pupil premium funding, which is funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in England, would increase to £1,550 for Primary aged pupils, £1,100 for Secondary aged pupils and £2,690 for children who were care-experienced.
- The High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has been in deficit since the 2019/20 financial year. As at March 2025, the cumulative brought-forward deficit stood at £13.6m and this is forecast to increase to £18.3m by the end of the 2025/26 financial year.
- From 2022/23 onwards, a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB has been implemented each year following agreement by the Schools Forum to help address increasing SEND demand. However, these transfers have been insufficient to offset the cumulative deficit.
- In November 2021, following consultation with the Schools Forum, it was agreed to begin aligning school budgets with the government's requirement for local authorities to adopt or move closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF), also referred to as the hard formula.
- Brent has applied all NFF factor rates, except for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Low Prior Attainment (LPA), which are set at the minimum permitted levels. It was therefore proposed that, for the 2026/27 financial year, the previously approved 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB be disapplied, as schools are unable to sustain this transfer.

- Brent is set to receive a total DSG funding allocation of £452m in 2026/27 compared to £432m in 2025/26, which represents an overall increase of £20m.
- The growth funding allocation has reduced to £1.3m compared to £1.8m in 2025/26. This allocation is based on the difference between the number of pupils on roll in each school between the October 2024 and October 2025 school censuses. This growth funding allocation is included in the overall Schools Block funding for 2026/27 as shown in Table 1 of the report.
- The final HNB allocation is £95.2m. This is £4.3m more than the allocation for 2025/26 and represents a funding increase of 4.7%.
- The 4.7% increase in funding in 2026/27 is considerably less than the 8% increase seen in EHCPs between January 2024 and January 2025 and would not contribute towards reducing the projected cumulative DSG deficit of £18.3m. It would, however, contribute towards funding any further additional pressures due to continued increases in the number of ECHPs. Members were advised that a detailed breakdown of the HNB budget was due to be presented to Schools Forum in February 2026.
- The Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) provides funding for local authorities to deliver central functions on behalf of pupils in maintained schools and academies. The CSSB funding is split into two elements: funding for ongoing responsibilities and funding for historic commitments. For 2026/27, the CSSB income has been confirmed as £2.5m, an increase of 1.4% compared to £2.4m in 2025/26. Table 7.1 in the report set out how the budgets are calculated for individual schools.
- As shown in Table 2 of the report, the mainstream funding formula for 2026/27 is £309m. This includes £2.9m of the Schools Block funding which had been clawed back by the DfE to pay for Non-Domestic Business Rates directly to billing authorities on behalf of schools. £0.54m has been excluded for the growth fund. The allocation has been reduced by £0.86m for de-delegated funds and £0.52m has been retained by the Council as a contribution towards fulfilling education services, including school improvement services. The remainder of £304.23m will be transferred to schools.
- The School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant that was introduced by the government in 2017 had now been discontinued by DfE. However, the DfE allows the local authority to, in consultation with schools, charge this funding directly to schools. This is de-delegated from the schools block and it was proposed to allocate £159,000 from the overall schools block funding to continue to provide this service.
- The de-delegated items, which the maintained schools members were required to agree were set out in Table 8.2 of the report.
- The proportion of schools relying heavily on reserves remains high with 43% of schools planning to use 50% or more of their reserves compared to 42% in 2024/25. It was therefore proposed to continue to de-delegate funds to support schools in difficulty at a reduced amount of £0.150m, in line with the forecast spend in the current financial year. This would lead to a reduction in the per pupil de-delegated rate of £1.19 at £7.78 compared to £8.97 in 2025/26.
- Schools Forum agreed in January 2024 that in exceptional circumstances school redundancies were eligible to be funded centrally through DSG funding, where a school requesting access to this support met the funding criteria in the redundancy policy. It was agreed that redundancies should be funded from the Schools Facing Financial Difficulties Fund (SFFDF) and to maintain this allocation at £0.3m. There was a £0.21 increase in the proposed rate for 2026/27

at £15.55 per pupil due to a fall in pupil numbers compared to the last financial year.

- The per pupil rates (£1.81) increase of £0.54 from last financial year was mainly due to a fall in pupil numbers. This was required to maintain the Free Schools Meals eligibility service at £35k, including an allocation increase to meet the costs (covering the pay award and NIC increase).
- It was proposed to increase the maternity and paternity supply cover budget by £72k, in line with the current 2025/26 outturn forecast and to raise the Trade Union service budget by £10k to meet additional staff costs resulting from the current year's pay award.
- The proposed set aside of a growth budget of £0.540m for the current Choice Advice and Fair Access Interview (CAFAl) arrangements was agreed. This is currently provided to 3 schools to continue to meet the local authority's requirement to meet basic needs for children who had newly arrived in the UK and required additional educational support. Members were advised this programme was currently under review and further updates on any proposed changes would be brought to Schools Forum for approval.
- There were currently no formal agreements between the local authority and any of the schools to support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need and therefore no budget is being set aside for this.
- Where local authorities operate a falling rolls fund, they are only able to provide funding where school capacity data (SCAP) shows that school places would be required in 2026/27 and/or the subsequent 2 years (this was a mandatory requirement). Brent's SCAP, as reported in Brent's School Place Planning Strategy 2025-28, shows that fallings rolls were projected for 2026/27 and therefore, this funding would not apply for the next financial year.
- For 2026/27 funding year, the DfE has reaffirmed that local authorities must continue to bring their local formulae closer to the NFF. Specifically, they are required to shift their local factor values by at least 10% closer to the national formula each year, unless they already mirror it. A fixed target date by which the direct NFF would be in place has not been set, although the expectation is a move to the direct NFF by the 2027/28 funding year at the latest.
- The change in formula rates primarily allocated 25% of the additional pupil led funding through AWPU for all Primary and Secondary schools and targets schools with high deprivation via FSM as well as schools with a high number of pupils with EAL across both phases.
- The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) threshold range for 2026/27 is between -0.5% and 0.0%. The MFG has been set at the maximum allowable rate of 0%. This means that the per pupil funding rates will in the minimum remain the same as last year but not decrease. Under these proposals 17 out of 76 schools require an MFG allocation and this totals £0.87m. This adjustment is included in the overall post de-delegations and education functions budget as shown in Appendix B.
- Appendix B of the report contained an analysis of the funding formula by individual school, giving both the total formula funding and per pupil funding against the previous year.
- The split site factor set by DfE was compulsory for all local authorities, ensuring that split site funding is allocated consistently and fairly across the country. This recognises a basic eligibility criteria that attracts a lump-sum payment of £63k and a distance of 600m eligibility criteria that attracts an additional lump-sum payment of up to £32k.

- In regard to The Mayor's Free School Meals for 2026-27, the Mayor has confirmed his commitment to continue to deliver the universal Free School Meals scheme for state funded primary schools. Funding has been allocated for the next academic year and would be based on school census data.

The Chair thanked Folake Olufeko for her report and welcomed any questions from the Forum with the following being noted:

- Lucy Cox asked about the effect that falling rolls were having on schools and if there were any long-term plans to address the position. In response, Shirley Parks (Director Education Partnerships and Strategy) advised this was subject to review as part of the Brent School Place Planning Strategy reported to Cabinet in November each year. This detailed Brent's forecasts by planning area. In some areas of Brent, falling rolls were anticipated and in some areas, forecasts were more positive. It was noted that the strategy sets out all of the approaches that Brent is currently using to support schools with falling rolls, including capping numbers and reducing published admission numbers where appropriate. Brent has taken the decision to not to close any schools at this point in time, other than the Gwenneth Rickus site, the second site of Leopold School.

In reaffirming this commitment, Councillor Grahl outlined the work undertaken to ensure mitigations remained in place to support schools in managing the impact of changes in the forecast demand for pupil places and associated impact on school budgets, which also combined with efforts being made to increase SEND provision across the borough through the use of excess capacity.

- Raphael Moss asked about the High Needs Block and the implications of the deficit increasing for the Local Authority and for schools. Folake Olufeko stated that the budgets for the High Needs Block were currently being set and would be brought to the Schools Forum in February 2026. The service is forecasting a budget pressure of £4.7m in year which, combined with the lack of schools block transfer, would have an impact in 2026/27. An update on the HNB Management Plan aimed at addressing the funding gap would be brought to Schools Forum in February. The High Needs Block Sub-Group would also be meeting to review the position.

As a further update, Shirley Parks advised the Forum of the additional measures and investment planned by the local authority to enhance SEND capacity across the borough was a means of reducing the need for more costly out of borough placements. This includes the provision of additional special school places as well as Additional Resourced Provision with efforts also focussed on making the most effective use of the funding available to support schools. Engagement was also ongoing with the DfE in advance of the publication of the Schools White Paper and SEND reforms. It was noted that Brent compared relatively well to other local authorities in terms of the level of deficit budget on its High Needs Block.

The Forum also took the opportunity to praise the Council, Cabinet Member and officers on the recent opening of Wembley Manor School, as a specialist SEND school. The impact not only on the quality of education but in managing costs associated with SEND provision was noted.

The Chair thanked officers for the report. As no further questions or comments were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Endorse the 2026/27 budget for the DSG Blocks, including the mainstream funding formula, for reference to Full Council for approval.
- (2) Agree the 2026/27 growth fund, in line with the DfE's mandatory requirements for the treatment of the growth fund allocation.
- (3) Note the application of a Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) rate of 0%, in line with the DfE's MFG threshold range which was between -0.5% and 0.0% for the 2026/27 financial year.
- (4) Agree to disapply the previously approved 0.5% funding transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block (HNB) in order to set the budgets in accordance with the Schools Forum agreement and the government's directive to continue to move towards the National Funding Formula (NFF), using permitted NFF factors within DfE thresholds

Maintained school members of the Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to approve the proposed de-delegation arrangements set out within the report. These included include adjustments to the de-delegated contingencies budget to:

- Reduce the allocation for supporting schools in financial difficulty in line with current spend.
- Increase the allocation for free school meals eligibility checking service based on actual cost.
- Increase allocations for staff-related costs, including maternity and paternity supply cover and trade union facility time in line with current spend.

8. Early Years Block Budgets 2026/27

Pallavi Shah (Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council) introduced a report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, which set out the DSG Early Years' (EY) Block funding for Brent. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- The report sought Schools Forum endorsement of the local EY Funding Formula for 2026/27, following the confirmation of the DSG Early Years' (EY) Block funding for Brent.
- The 2026/27 EY Block funding for Brent is £45.4m, an increase of 12.9% from 2025/26 allocations.
- The Forum was updated on Brent's EY Funding Formula for 2026/27, as supported by the EY Funding Subgroup.
- The maintained nursery schools supplementary funding has increased from £91m to £92m, which was an uplift of 9%. The hourly rate has also increased by 3.8%.

The Chair thanked Pallavi Shah for her report. As no further questions or comments were raised the Forum **RESOLVED** to

- (1) Note the requirement for local authorities to have an additional support 2-year-old rate that was at least equal to the rate for 2-year-old children of working parents.
- (2) Endorse Brent's EY Funding Formula for 2026/27, as supported by the EY Funding Subgroup on the basis of the following updates being applied to the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF):
 - a) A universal base rate for Brent providers for 3 and 4-year-old funding of £6.33 per hour. This represents an 9.9% increase of £0.57p from £5.76 in 2025/26.
 - b) Following a review of the benchmarking data, a reduction in the deprivation supplement from 10% to 5% from the 3 and 4-year-old funding allocation, bringing it in line with other local authorities.
 - c) A base rate of £9.91 to pay Brent providers for the additional support (formerly known as the disadvantaged) 2-year-old entitlement. This represents a 1.4% increase of £0.14 from £9.77 in 2025/26.
 - d) A base rate of £9.51 to pay Brent providers for the 2-year-old working parent entitlement. This represents a 0.7% increase of £0.07 from £9.44 in 2025/26.
 - e) A base rate of £13.00 to pay Brent providers for children aged 9 months up to 2 years. This represents a 0.6% increase of £0.08 from £12.92 in 2025/26.
 - f) A reduction of 1% (from 4% to 3%) of funding centrally retained by the local authority from the 3 and 4-year-old funding, following the DfE's mandatory requirement to pass through a minimum of 97% of this funding to early years providers.
 - g) An increase from 2% to 3% in centrally retained funding by the local authority from 2-year-old working parent and 9-months old to 2-year-old working parents, in line with the DfE's requirement to pass through a minimum of 97% of this funding to early years providers.
 - h) An allocation of £0.644m for the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF), in line with the DfE's expectation that local authorities earmark this funding for children below compulsory school age with special educational needs (SEN) eligible for or taking up the new and existing entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken and based on local eligibility. This funding will be allocated by the Under 5s Nursery Panel, and both PVI and maintained providers can apply for this funding. The SENIF will continue to target children with low-level and emerging needs, ensuring inclusive provision for vulnerable children.
 - i) An introduction of a contingency fund of £0.37m to help manage fluctuations in the take up of the entitlements after the census. This fund will serve as a key mechanism for maintaining flexibility and support the management of volumes and budgets throughout the year. A contingency fund was needed for 2026/27 in response to the DfE's move to a termly funding system, where all early years' entitlement will be funded based on actual termly census headcounts.
- (3) To note that local authorities must announce their funding rates to childcare providers by 28 February 2026, as this deadline was now a statutory requirement under the regulations from the financial year 2026/27.

9. Any Other Urgent Business

9.1 Family Friendly Policies

Given the Forum's focus on school funding, it was **AGREED** that an issue raised by Lucy Cox regarding to Family Friendly Policies within schools would be picked up as part of the NEU's regular meeting with Shirley Parks. Director of Education, Partnerships and Strategy.

9.2 Head of Education & Learning

Shirley Parks took the opportunity to introduce Gareth Drawmer to the Forum as Brent Council's newly appointed Head of Education and Learning.

10. Dates of Future Meetings

Members noted the remaining date for the meeting of the Schools Forum for the 2025-26 Municipal Year as follows:

- Thursday 26 February 2026

The meeting closed at 6:50pm.

Andy Prindiville
Vice Chair in Chair

	<p align="center">Schools Forum 26 February 2026</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</p>
<p>High Needs Block (HNB) Budget 2026/27</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt:	N/A
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – HNB Budget Allocation 2026/27 Appendix 2 – Movement in HNB Budgets 2026/27 Appendix 3– 2026/27 Proposed Top-Up Banding Rates
Background Papers:	Prior Financial reports to Schools Forum
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Folake Olufeko Head of Finance – CYPCD 0208 937 2491 Email: Folake.Olufeko@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Pallavi Shah Senior Finance Analyst – CYPCD Email: Pallavi.Shah@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Roxanna Glennon Head of Inclusion Email: Roxanna.Glennon@brent.gov.uk</p>

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report informs Schools Forum of the detailed HNB budgets for adoption in 2026/27.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That Schools Forum notes the report and agrees the HNB budgets as set out in Appendix 1.

3. Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

- 3.1. This report is linked to the Council's Borough Plan which aims to support children and young people to get the best start in life, by working in partnership with schools and other partners to ensure access to education is fair and equal.

4. Background

- 4.1. The DfE's HNB funding has been confirmed at £95.3m for 2026/27. This is £4.3m more than that received in 2025/26 and represents an increase of 4.7%.
- 4.2. £9.9m of the total HNB funding will be recouped by the Department for Education (DfE) to be paid directly to academies for their base funding, leaving a balance of £85.4m.
- 4.3. To set the Schools Block budgets in line with the Schools Forum agreement in January 2026 and the government's requirement to continue moving towards the National Funding Formula (NFF), the previously approved 0.5% (c£1.5m) transfer from the Schools Block to the HNB will not apply in 2026/27. The Schools Block funding allocation is insufficient to sustain this transfer under the NFF funding factors used to set the Schools Block budgets, as discussed at the Schools Forum meeting on 26 January 2026.
- 4.4. The government has suspended the High Needs NFF, which previously determined local authorities' high needs allocations. As an interim measure, while the high needs funding methodology is being reviewed to ensure alignment with wider Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, allocations have been based on 2025/26 funding levels. Brent's HNB allocation of £95.3m for the next financial year is therefore derived from the Local Authority's 2025/26 funding, rather than a full NFF calculation that would have reflected increases in commissioned school places for children with SEND in 2026/27.
- 4.5. As a result of the NFF suspension, the HNB allocation for the 2026/27 financial year does not include updated basic entitlement pupil numbers for special schools, nor the usual special free school adjustment. However, the import/export adjustment, which reflects movements of pupils across local authority boundaries and the associated cost implications will continue to apply for 2026/27.
- 4.6. The £4.3m year-on-year increase in funding against the HNB largely reflects the consolidation of the annualised 2025/26 Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) relating to special units and resourced provision. Consequently, this increase does not provide sufficient capacity to meet new demand pressures or inflationary cost increases in 2026/27.
- 4.7. The government has confirmed in its response to the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in February 2026 that grant funding will be allocated to cover 90% of local authorities' accumulated SEND deficits up to the end of March 2026. Conditions for accessing support have been set. Importantly, this support does not involve reallocating money from the core schools' budgets, meaning therefore that mainstream school funding remains protected.
- 4.8. As part of wider SEND system reforms, a number of initiatives have been announced with further details to be set out in the upcoming Schools White Paper. The aim is to make specialist places in mainstream schools a core part of the local school offer across the country. The government has announced £3bn of capital investment over the next four years to create new specialist places for children with SEND in mainstream schools. This funding will aim to support inclusive mainstream schools through the development of specialist units and "calm learning spaces", such as breakout rooms tailored for students with autism, ADHD and other SEND needs. A £38bn capital investment in the education estate between 2025/26 and 2029/30 has also been announced, to deliver new places planned through special free schools, either by building the schools or by providing local authorities with funding to create equivalent specialist places, and an expansion of the existing School Rebuilding Programme. Three mainstream Brent schools are currently included in the School

Rebuilding Programme and applications for a further 250 nationwide school rebuilding projects are expected to open in the new year.

5. HNB pressures and Demand

- 5.1 Brent's High Needs Block remains under significant pressure due to rising demand for statutory SEND support. The cumulative DSG deficit forecast is £18.4m by the end of 2025/26, following an in-year quarter 3 forecast overspend of £4.8m in 2025/26. As of January 2025, the number of EHCPs had increased by 8% compared to January 2024, with demand continuing to grow.
- 5.2 Table 1 shows the year-on-year increase in EHCPs over the past 6 years compared to the national average. Between January 2021 and January 2025, the number of children with EHCPs increased by 1,011 (36%). In July 2025 the number of EHCPs reached 4,000 for the first time and it is currently 4,186 as of January 2026.

Table 1: Annual Increase in EHCPs

Brent EHCPs as per SEN2 Return	Jan-21	Jan-22	Jan-23	Jan-24	Jan-25	Jan-26
Number of EHCPs	2784	2938	3251	3500	3795	4186
Brent % Increase	15%	6%	11%	8%	8%	10%
National % Increase	10%	10%	9%	11%	10.8%	pending publication

- 5.3 The growth in EHCPs is a national and London wide trend with the number of children assessed as meeting the threshold for support continuing to increase. As funding has not increased at the same pace as the increase in EHCPs, this continues to create financial pressures for many local authorities.

This pressure is likely to be compounded by increasing price costs in the independent sector in the new financial year, associated with increasing wage costs following changes in the employer's national insurance contributions. A funding gap of up to £14.9m is forecast in the HNB for the next financial year 2026/27, which reflects projected growth in the number of children requiring EHCPs.

- 5.4 The forecast £14.9m funding gap in 2026/27 arises from several cost pressures, including:
- £2.3m for out-of-borough placements
 - £2.3m for independent sector placements
 - £1.3m for post-16 placements
 - £6.1m linked to increased commissioned SEND places and complexity of need.

6. Detailed budget area changes

- 6.1. Where the number of places within special provisions has changed, this is reflected in the place funding and top up funding budgets (Appendix 1).
- 6.2. The budget assumes that the top up banding rates will remain the same for the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Special Schools (Appendix 3).

- 6.3. The rates for Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) have been standardised to £12,500 following Schools Forum approval in June 2025.
- 6.4. For 2026/27, the local authority is required to consolidate all relevant legacy funding into a single CSBG-combined rate, applied to each school's agreed place numbers for the year. This includes the four 2025/26 funding streams now rolled into the CSBG: the historic Teachers' Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG), the additional 3.4% cost-pressure funding, the 2025/26 Core Schools Budget Grant, and an annualised 2025/26 pay-award funding. £6.4m has been set aside to pass on these grants to PRUs, Alternative Provision (AP) and Special Schools. This represents an increase of £4.5m compared to the additional grants allocated in 2025/26, utilising the total £4.3m growth against the HNB.
- 6.5. There are increases in the overall top-up funding allocations for special schools and mainstream pupils both in and out of the borough. These budget increases reflect the rise in demand through increased commissioned places and the spending patterns of previous years. In total £11.8m of the increased HNB funding has been allocated to meet demand pressures.
- 6.6. The recoupment budget, which offsets expenditure relating to pupils from other boroughs, has been set at £3m in line with current forecast and projected demand. There is a £0.7m reduction against this budget to reflect a change in the recoupment process from April 2026 - academies will be required to recoup EHCP costs for school placements by other local authorities directly and no longer through the Local Authority.
- 6.7. The budget for funding the education element of the cost of placing children in independent residential special schools has reduced by £0.2m, in line with current forecasts. £12.6m has been allocated for the education element of the cost of children placed in independent day special schools. This budget is expected to overspend in the next financial year given the current forecast projection of £11.7m and a forecast growth of 8%. This pressure is compounded by the DfE's decision not to fund the increase in place numbers for 2026/27, which adds further strain to the cumulative deficit. The detailed analysis of the impact of these unfunded pressures is set out in the HNB Deficit Management Plan provided in a separate report to this Forum.
- 6.8. Due to the complexities of the post-16 charging process, expenditure forecasting remains challenging. The budget has therefore been set using the best estimate of the current year's forecast and has been set at £6.3m, an increase of £1.3m from 2025/26.
- 6.9. A zero-based approach has been used to set the SEN Services budget. The £0.5m increase reflects the alignment of staffing to establishment levels, a projected 3.8% pay award and higher demand within the Speech and Language Therapy contract.

7. DSG Deficit Position and Projections

- 7.1. Since 2020, a statutory override has been in place that allows local authorities to hold deficit balances against their DSG budgets, separating this from their general revenue budgets. This override has been extended to 2028 under the current government, pending wider reform of the system.
- 7.2. In the recent budget announcement, the government confirmed that future funding implications for SEND will be managed within the overall government Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL), meaning local authorities will not be expected to fund future SEND costs from general funds once the statutory override ends in 2028.
- 7.3. The government has also confirmed that grant funding will be allocated to cover 90% of local authorities' accumulated SEND deficits up to the end of March 2026.

- 7.4. In line with the above, if 90% grant funding is allocated to Brent to address the cumulative deficit, the current deficit forecast of £18.4m will reduce to £1.84m. However, if the forecast overspend of £14.9m in 2026/27 comes to fruition, the cumulative deficit by March 2027 would be £16.7m. Treatment of the remaining 10% of deficits accrued by 31 March 2026 has not yet been confirmed.
- 7.5. The government has confirmed that local authorities can expect a similarly proportionate approach to the financial support offered to cover deficits up until the end of March 2026 for the deficits that arise in 2026/27 and 2027/28, though this will not be unlimited.
- 7.6. Based on current modelling, pressures are projected to increase the cumulative deficit to £29m by March 2027 and £46m by the end of March 2028 when the statutory override is planned to end. These projections do not reflect any additional grant funding, but include mitigations set out in the council's DSG Deficit Management Plan which will be reviewed during this Schools Forum meeting.
- 7.7. Overall, nationally the deficit is circa £5bn, which evidences the urgent need for structural reform to the SEND system.

8.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 8.1 The Schools Forum, a representative group of schools and settings, is regularly kept abreast of schools' budgets, including the Management Plan to address the deficit arising from the High Needs Block of the DSG. The Lead Member for Children, Young People, Schools and Community Development is also regularly briefed on matters related to the DSG including Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- 8.2 The Schools Forum High Needs Block sub-group met on 9 February 2026 to discuss the HNB budget and the final detailed budget that is provided in Appendix 1.

9.0 Financial considerations

- 9.1 The available resources have been allocated within the funding constraints, leaving a forecast budgetary gap of £14.9m in 2026/27, in addition to the current deficit projection of £18.4m by the end of March 2026. In line with the above, if 90% grant funding is allocated to Brent to address the cumulative deficit, the current deficit forecast of £18.4m will reduce to £1.84m. The forecast cumulative deficit by March 2027 is therefore £16.7m.
- 9.2 The main risk against the HNB budget remains the rising number of children and young people with EHCPs. In Brent, as of December 2025, there were 4,163 children and young people with an EHCP compared to 3,798 in December 2024, representing a 9.6% increase.
- 9.3 There is also the risk of rising inflation for SEND provision in out-of-borough and independent placements, though this may be partially mitigated through the commissioning arrangements.

10.0 Legal considerations

- 10.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

11.0 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations

- 11.1 The key groups affected by the proposals are children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 in Brent. The Council is committed to inclusive education for all children and

young people with SEND whether in mainstream schools, in additionally resourced provision in mainstream schools or within special schools.

12.0 Climate Change and environmental considerations

12.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications directly arising from this report.

13.0 Communication considerations

13.1 Not applicable.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

Appendix 1 - High Needs Block Budget Allocations 2026-27

Description	2025-267 Budget		2026-27 Budget		Budget Change (£)	Budget Change (%)	Comments 2026/27
	Place numbers	Budget £	Place numbers	Budget £			
PLACE FUNDING							
ASHLEY COLLEGE (HEALTH NEEDS EDUCATION SERVICE)	25	£250,000	25	£250,000	£0	0%	PRU Place funding Budget
BRENT RIVER COLLEGE - KEY STAGE 3 & 4 PRU	56	£560,000	56	£560,000	£0	0%	
BRENT RIVER COLLEGE - PRIMARY	7	£70,000	7	£70,000	£0	0%	
ROUNDWOOD	30		43	£430,000	£430,000		
FAWOOD	10	£100,000	10	£100,000	£0	0%	Numbers to decrease from 49 to 42 from September 2026
GRANVILLE PLUS NURSERY	7	£70,000	7	£70,000	£0	0%	
SUNSHINE	12	£120,000	12	£120,000	£0	0%	
KINGSBURY GREEN	30	£180,000	30	£180,000	£0	0%	
FRYENT	45	£269,500	45	£269,500	£0	0%	
KILBURN PARK	16	£96,000	16	£96,000	£0	0%	
CARLTON VALE	10	£60,000	10	£60,000	£0	0%	
ELSLEY	10	£60,000	10	£60,000	£0	0%	
NEWFIELD	14	£82,500	15	£90,000	£7,500	9%	
NEWMAN CATHOLIC COLLEGE	15	£87,500	25	£150,000	£62,500	71%	
PRESTON PARK	19	£115,500	21	£126,000	£10,500	9%	Opened in October 2025 for 25 places
OAKINGTON MANOR	25		25		£0		Opened in September 2025 for 21 places
ST MARGARET CLITHEROW	10		15	£90,000	£90,000		Expected to open in January 2026 -15 places
KINGSBURY HIGH	8		1	£5,000	£5,000		Expected to close in July 2026
PRESTON MANOR	32		27		£0		
PHOENIX ARCH	55	£550,000	55	£550,000	£0	0%	
WOODFIELD	200		200		£0		
MANOR HOUSE	204		264		£0		
THE VILLAGE	315		310		£0		
AVENUE	108		132		£0		
WEMBLEY MANOR	80		135		£0		
ROUNDWOOD					£0		
Place Funding Total	1,342	£2,671,000	1,496	£3,276,500	£605,500	23%	
ELEMENT 3 TOP-UP FUNDING							
ASHLEY COLLEGE (HEALTH NEEDS EDUCATION SERVICE)	40	£856,290	40	£856,290	£0	0%	PRU Top-up Budgets
BRENT RIVER COLLEGE - KEY STAGE 3 & 4 PRU	56	£1,208,730	56	£1,208,730	£0	0%	
BRENT RIVER COLLEGE - PRIMARY	7	£203,531	7	£203,531	£0	0%	
ROUNDWOOD	30		43	£1,006,200	£1,006,200		
FAWOOD	10	£105,158	10	£125,000	£19,842	19%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
GRANVILLE PLUS NURSERY	7	£78,905	7	£87,500	£8,595	11%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
SUNSHINE	12	£135,265	12	£150,000	£14,735	11%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
KINGSBURY GREEN	30	£310,722	30	£375,000	£64,278	21%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
FRYENT	45	£557,568	45	£561,458	£3,890	1%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
KILBURN PARK	16	£198,614	16	£200,000	£1,386	1%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
CARLTON VALE	10	£124,134	10	£125,000	£866	1%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
ELSLEY	10	£124,134	10	£125,000	£866	1%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
NEWFIELD	14	£170,684	15	£187,500	£16,816	10%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
PRESTON PARK	19	£238,958	21	£262,500	£23,542	10%	New ARP from September 2025
ROUNDWOOD	30		43		£0		
OAKINGTON MANOR	25	£210,393	25	£312,500	£102,107	49%	Increased ARP rate to £12.5k
KINGSBURY HIGH	3	£31,072	1	£10,417	(£20,656)	-66%	Expected to close in July 2026
ST MARGARET CLITHEROW	10	£123,099	15	£187,500	£64,401	52%	New ARP from January 2026
NEWMAN CATHOLIC COLLEGE	15	£181,029	25	£312,500	£131,471	73%	New ARP from October 2025
PRESTON MANOR	32	£344,431	27	£337,500	(£6,931)	-2%	
WOODFIELD	200	£4,122,848	200	£4,376,893	£254,045	6%	Reflects movements in bands to meet higher complexity of need
MANOR HOUSE	211	£5,875,839	264	£6,772,977	£897,138	15%	Increased commissioned places
WEMBLEY MANOR	80	£2,101,963	135	£3,000,032	£898,069	43%	Increased commissioned places
THE VILLAGE	315	£7,958,300	310	£8,435,478	£477,178	6%	Reflects movements in bands to meet higher complexity of need
PHOENIX ARCH	55	£1,235,667	55	£1,265,537	£29,869	2%	Reflects movements in bands to meet higher complexity of need
AVENUE	108	£3,239,990	132	£3,959,991	£720,001	22%	Increased commissioned places
IB Mainstream Top- Ups - Maintained		£7,920,140		£8,627,171	£707,031	9%	
IB Mainstream Top- Ups - Academies		£7,405,200		£7,525,117	£119,916	2%	Top up now excludes Out Borough - to be charged directly by academy schools.
Teachers' Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG)		£683,100		£0	(£683,100)	-100%	Merged into CSBG
Additional 3.4% Special Schools, PRUs & Aps		£1,202,972		£0	(£1,202,972)	-100%	Merged into CSBG
PRUs & AP - Core Schools Budget Grant				£661,959	£661,959		PRUs & AP - CSBG (includes TPPG & additional 3.4% funding)
ARP units Core Schools Budget Grant				£166,210	£166,210		ARPs - CSBG
Special Schools Core Schools Budget Grant				£5,601,366	£5,601,366		Special Schools CSBG (includes historic TPPG & additional 3.4% funding)
OB Mainstream		£3,420,457		£4,700,000	£1,279,543	37%	In line with 2025/26 forecast outturn
OB Special		£4,500,000		£5,500,000	£1,000,000	22%	In line with 2025/26 forecast outturn
OB ARP		£100,000		£100,000	£0	0%	In line with 2025/26 forecast outturn

Description	2025-267 Budget		2026-27 Budget		Budget Change (£)	Budget Change (%)	Comments 2026/27
	Place numbers	Budget £	Place numbers	Budget £			
Recoupment income		(£3,700,000)		(£3,000,000)	£700,000	▼ -19%	Excludes out borough placements in mainstream academies
Independent Day		£10,294,756		£12,613,650	£2,318,894	▲ 23%	In line with 2025/26 forecast outturn plus 10%
Independent Residential		£1,200,000		£1,000,000	(£200,000)	▼ -17%	In line with 2025/26 forecast outturn
Post 16		£5,000,000		£6,300,000	£1,300,000	▲ 26%	In line with 2025/26 forecast outturn
Top-ups Total	1,390	£67,763,950	1,554	£84,240,507	£16,476,557	▲ 24%	
LA SERVICES							
Education Otherwise/ Awaiting Placement		£1,982,000		£1,982,000	£0	▬ 0%	Based on previous budget
Early Years Inclusion Fund		£1,089,160		£1,090,000	£840	▬ 0%	Based on increased enhanced provision rates
SEN Services		£7,612,000		£8,139,722	£527,722	▬ 7%	Projected increase in pay award and Speech and Language contract
Support for Inclusion		£1,000,480		£1,000,480	£0	▬ 0%	Based on previous budget
SEN Transport		£138,987		£100,000	(£38,987)	▼ -28%	Based on previous budget
SEN SUPPORT		£500,000		£500,000	£0	▬ 0%	Based on previous budget
LA services Total		£12,322,627		£12,812,202	£489,575	▬ 4%	
Total Expenditure		82,757,576.81		100,329,208	17,571,631		
HNB Allocation		£90,976,185		£95,247,143	£4,270,958		
Block Transfer		£1,477,561		£0	(£1,477,561)		
Total HNB Allocation		£92,453,746		£95,247,143	£2,793,397		
ESFA Recoupment to Academies		(£9,696,169)		(£9,862,000)	(£165,831)		
Additional import/export adjustment							
HN Budget Available		£82,757,576.51		£85,385,143	£2,627,566		
Net position		£0		£14,944,065	£14,944,065		
DSG Funding including Supplementary grant		£90,976,185		£95,247,143	£4,270,958		
ESFA Recoupment to Academies		(£9,696,169)		(£9,862,000)	(£165,831)		
Funding less amount recouped for academies		£81,280,016		£85,385,143	£4,105,127		
Schools Block contribution		£1,477,561		£0	(£1,477,561)		
Income budget inclusive of Schools Block Contribution		£82,757,577		£85,385,143	£2,627,566		

Appendix 2 - Movement in HNB Budgets 2026/27

Expenditure	Movement	% Change
Increase in top-up nos.	164	12%
Place funding increase	£605,500	23%
ARPs & Special Top-up increase	£4,707,710	16%
IB Mainstream Top- Ups - Maintained	£707,031	9%
IB Mainstream Top- Ups - Academies	£119,916	2%
Teachers' Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG)	(£683,100)	-100%
Additional 3.4% Special schools, PRUs & APs	(£1,202,972)	-100%
PRUs & AP - Core Schools Budget Grant	£661,959	100%
ARP units Core Schools Budget Grant	£166,210	100%
Special Schools Core Schools Budget Grant	£5,601,366	100%
OB Mainstream	£1,279,543	37%
OB Special	£1,000,000	22%
OB ARP	£0	0%
Recoupment income	£700,000	-19%
Independent Day	£2,318,894	23%
Independent Residential	(£200,000)	-17%
Post 16	£1,300,000	26%
SEN Services including SaLT contract	£489,575	4%
	£17,571,631	
Income budget movement	(£2,627,566)	
Overall net increase in expenditure	£14,944,065	18%

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Appendix 3 - Brent Proposed Bandings 2026-27

Special Schools						
Special Schools	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Band 6
Core Funding	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
Top-Up Funding	£4,327	£7,053	£11,054	£15,066	£19,079	£30,000
Total	£14,327	£17,053	£21,054	£25,066	£29,079	£40,000

Mainstream Schools		
Mainstream Schools		
Notional (Element 2) £6,000		
Band	Points	Top-up (Element 3 exclusive of £6k notional)
Band 1	0-97	£0
Band 2	98-125	£6,400
Band 3	126-153	£8,400
Band 4	154-170	£10,500
Band 5	171-205	£12,600
Band 6	206+	£14,600
Band 7	*AS	£19,000

*Only those awaiting special school place

Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP)	
ARPs	
Core Funding	£6,000
Top-Up funding	£12,500
Total	£18,500

* Unfilled spaces are funded at £10,000

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 Brent	Schools Forum 26 February 2026
Report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development	
Update on the DSG High Needs Block Deficit Management Plan	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt:	N/A
List of Appendices:	Appendix A – Brent DSG Deficit Management Plan February 2026
Background Papers:	Previous Schools Forum papers
Contact Officer(s):	Roxanna Glennon Head of Inclusion Tel: 0208 937 2785 Email: Roxanna.Glennon@brent.gov.uk Folake Olufeko Head of Finance – CYPCD Tel: 0208 937 2491 Email: Folake.Olufeko@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. This report provides a further update on progress to date against the DSG Management Plan aimed at supporting a reduction in expenditure against the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) at a sustainable level.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 Schools Forum is asked to note the updated Deficit Management Plan, in the context of recent updates from the government regarding support towards local authorities' accumulated DSG deficits and in consideration of the Schools White paper that is expected to be published this Spring.

3.0 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

3.1 This report is linked to the Council's Borough Plan which aims to support children and young people to get the best start in life, by working in partnership with schools and other partners to ensure access to education is fair and equal.

4.0 Background

4.1 The cumulative DSG deficit forecast is £18.4m by the end of 2025/26, following an in-year quarter 3 forecast overspend of £4.8m in 2025/26. The main cost driver of this deficit is the rising number of children with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) without a comparative increase in DSG HNB funding. As of January 2025, the number of EHCPs had increased by 8% compared to January 2024, with demand continuing to grow.

4.2 Table 1 below shows the year-on-year increase of EHCPs over the past 6 years in Brent. The recent trend shows an average rate of growth of 10%, in line with the national trend, with a reduction in the last two years to 8% per year. This decline can be attributed to the successful pilot of the DBV in SEND Programme in Brent which commenced in 2022. For additional context, the HNB allocation from the DSG has only increased by 3% in 2024/25 and 6% in 2025/26, and 4.7% in 2026/27, highlighting the on-going budget pressures.

Table 1: Annual Increase in EHCPs

Brent EHCPs as per SEN2 Return	Jan-21	Jan-22	Jan-23	Jan-24	Jan-25	Jan-26
Number of EHCPs	2784	2938	3251	3500	3795	4186
Brent % Increase	15%	6%	11%	8%	8%	10%
National % Increase	10%	10%	9%	11%	10.8%	TBC pending publication

4.3 The government has indicated that a White Paper that sets out a new policy framework for support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will be shared in Spring 2026. As part of these reforms, the DfE has already announced changes to the national SEND system, such as every member of staff in nurseries, schools and colleges being required to receive SEND and inclusion training, supported by a £200m national training programme and a strengthened SEND Code of Practice. While these updates signal a stronger national emphasis on inclusion and on ensuring that mainstream settings are better equipped to meet a broad range of needs, the government has not yet set out detailed expectations or the funding arrangements that will underpin the wider reforms. In the meantime, Brent is continuing to drive forward agreed actions on the DSG Deficit Management Plan and to develop the local SEND system. In this regard, a Headteacher SEND Reference Group has been established with representation from early years, primary, secondary and special schools. The group is being used to shape changes to the local system, including the SEND support offer, to ensure it meets local needs.

5.0 DSG Deficit Management Plan Update

5.1 Following the end of Brent’s DfE funded ‘Delivering Better Value’ (DBV) programme in April 2025, and in response to the ongoing challenges within the SEND system nationally, Brent has recently (January 2026) refined its HNB Management Plan to better reflect the current position. The central tenets of the Management Plan, namely improving local sufficiency of special school places, further developing Brent’s support offer for students with SEND and improving oversight of individual EHCPs, remain similar to before. However, some important changes are included within these tenets, as outlined below:

- a) **Improving sufficiency of local places.** Brent’s Phase 1 capital programme for SEND (approved by Cabinet in January 2022) has to date delivered 298 additional places for children with SEND in Brent (with a further 84 expected to be delivered by January 2030). Despite this significant increase, further places are required.

If all Brent children who were eligible were to access a place at a maintained, in-borough special school, Brent would require a total of 1,221 places (634 primary and 587 secondary), with the majority of these places being for children who have either communication and interaction or cognition and learning as their primary area of need. Brent currently has 480 places in primary age special school classes and 497 places in secondary age special school places. Of these places, 12% are occupied by children from other boroughs, leaving 422 primary places available and 437 secondary places available. Given this, Brent has a current shortfall of 212 primary places in special and 150 secondary places in special. To prevent Brent children with EHCPs being

unplaced, the independent sector, home tuition, out-of-borough schools and the mainstream sector are all currently being utilised. As well as being less convenient for pupils who must travel longer distances to school, this is putting increasing strain on mainstream schools and the high needs block. To mitigate these pressures, a Phase 2 capital programme was developed in 2025, and was approved by Cabinet in January 2026.

The Phase 2 capital programme will deliver an additional 212 places for children with SEND in Brent focused on special school places. Based on the proposed completion dates, the programme could achieve potential cost avoidance of £4.3m over its duration, including £2.6m in 2026/27. This is based on creating 212 new places, with an average cost avoidance of £21k per place, representing the difference between placing a Brent child in an independent special school versus an in-borough special school. There is also the potential for transport cost avoidance estimated as £1.3m.

- b) **Further developing support for students with SEND** – In the 2025/26 financial year, additional capacity was added to Brent’s SEND Outreach teams including capacity in the SEND Support and Brent Outreach Autism Team (BOAT). Further plans to expand Brent’s SEND Outreach offer are currently in development and include a proposal for a service to replicate the most successful aspects of Brent’s DBV funded ‘Intervention First Team’ (IFT) offer (an early intervention SEMH support service for children aged 5-7 and their families). However, progressing plans to a stage where their financial impact could be accurately modelled has been paused whilst we await the release of the Schools White Paper (expected later this Spring 2026). This decision has been made as it is unclear what funding will be available within local areas for SEND Outreach and also where responsibilities for commissioning certain types of service will lie.

In addition to planning to expand Brent’s SEND Outreach offer, there are also plans in development to better integrate Brent’s health, early help and public health services to focus on improving child development outcomes in Brent, especially within the context of rising deprivation in borough. If Brent can establish robust and effective early intervention (starting at conception), the current data available suggests that this should have a downward pressure on spend in the HNB as children reach statutory school age. Work is ongoing with other boroughs who have engaged with similar projects in order to establish how the financial impacts of such a project could be modelled.

- c) **Financial management workstream.** This has involved a deep dive into each area of spend to identify efficiencies, including administrative charges to other local authorities for out-of-borough pupils in Brent (an increase of £125k in income) and a review of commissioning arrangements for placements within the independent sector. Additional proposed capacity in both SEND commissioning and the SEND 0-25 teams is being actively explored and a cost/benefit analysis completed. The focus of these roles would be on effectively managing spend in the independent non-maintained school sector (INMSS) and on education other than at school (EOTAS) packages, as well as spend on personal budgets. Brent is currently forecasting spend of £12.6m on INMSS provision for the 2025/26 financial year for 245 places (£51.4k/place/annum), an increase of £1m (and 8.5%) as compared with send on INMSS in the 2024/25.

6.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 6.1 Schools Forum is regularly kept abreast of the DSG, including the HNB Management Plan. The Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools is regularly updated on matters related to the DSG including SEND. The DSG Management Plan is also presented at the HNB Sub-group of the Schools’ Forum.

7.0 Financial considerations

- 7.1 The statutory override that allows local authorities to hold deficit balances against their DSG budgets, separating this from their general revenue budgets, has been extended to 2028 under the current government, pending wider reform of the system. The government has confirmed that future funding implications for SEND will be managed within the overall government Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL), meaning local authorities will not be expected to fund future SEND costs from general funds once the statutory override ends in 2028.
- 7.2 The government has confirmed that grant funding will be allocated to cover 90% of local authorities' accumulated SEND deficits up to the end of March 2026, subject to an agreed local SEND Reform Plan. Importantly, any future support will be linked to assurance that the council is taking steps to deliver a reformed, inclusive SEND system, aligned with the wider national reforms expected to be confirmed in the forthcoming Schools White Paper.
- 7.3 In line with the above, if 90% grant funding is allocated to Brent to address the cumulative deficit, the current deficit forecast of £18.4m will reduce to £1.84m at the end of March 2026. However, the current forecast overspend in 2026/27 is expected to be £14.9m based on current demand and spend projections. The cumulative deficit by March 2027 could therefore rise to £16.7m. Treatment of the remaining 10% of deficits accrued by 31 March 2026 has not yet been confirmed.
- 7.4 There remains a significant risk that the number of children and young people with EHCPs will continue to increase without the corresponding growth in HNB funding to fully cover the cost over the next two years. This long-standing mismatch has contributed to sustained financial pressures that have led to the deficit balance.
- 7.5 The government has confirmed that local authorities can expect a similarly proportionate approach to the financial support offered to cover deficits up until the end of March 2026 for the deficits that arise in 2026/27 and 2027/28, though this will not be unlimited.
- 7.6 Not taking into account any further grant funding from central government to support the cumulative deficit, the modelling of the current DSG Deficit Management Plan shows the cumulative deficit could increase to £29m by March 2027 and £46m by the end of March 2028 when the statutory override is planned to end. These projections include mitigations set out the Management Plan (Appendix 1).
- 7.7 The Management Plan will be revised to reflect new priorities in line with the SEND Reform Plan that will be developed in conjunction with the DfE (the Local Authority has been allocated a DfE SEND Finance Advisor). The modelling will also be updated once confirmation of the additional grant allocation to cover 90% has been received, as this is subject to the DfE's approval. Further updates on the Management Plan and on-going work with the DfE will be brought to future Schools Forum meetings.

8.0 Legal considerations

- 8.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

9.0 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations

- 9.1 The key groups affected by the proposals are children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 in Brent. The Council is committed to inclusive education for all children and young people with SEND whether in mainstream schools, additionally resourced provision in mainstream schools or special schools.

10.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

10.1 Not applicable

11.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

11.1 Not applicable.

12.0 Communication Considerations

12.1 All Schools Forum reports are published and available to members of the public and schools.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development

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Appendix 1 -DSG HNB Management Plan Summary - 2024/25 - 2027/28

	Actual £'000	Forecast £'000	Forecast £'000	Forecast £'000	
Income & Expenditure	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Comments
HNB income (excluding Schools Block transfer)	76,068	81,280	85,385	89,398	4.7% increase
High Needs Block expenditure	79,497	89,360	100,329	109,359	9% increase
In-Year Unmitigated Forecast Under/(Over) Spend	(3,429)	(8,080)	(14,944)	(19,961)	Unmitigated in year deficit
Cumulative (Deficit)/Surplus *Unmitigated*	(13,257)	(21,686)	(33,367)	(48,561)	Cumulative deficit
Schools Block 0.5% Transfer to HNB	1,360	1,478	0	0	
Cumulative (Deficit)/Surplus *Unmitigated* Post SB transfer	(11,897)	(20,208)	(33,367)	(48,561)	Unmitigated cumulative deficit post Schools Block transfer

Mitigating Items

Managing Demand

<u>EHC Plans ceased to maintain</u> Following Annual Reviews considering if Children & Young People have met their outcomes and if an EHC Plan is needed going forward	321				To be replaced with a revised plan in line with the SEND Reform Plan and outcome of the White Paper.
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Improving Sufficiency of Places

Establishing a <u>new special school in Brent</u> proposed 150 places (Wembley Manor)	538	533	238		New SEND School - Wembley Manor
<u>Increased ARPs</u> Work with current school clusters to explore with schools how needs can be best met locally, focusing on increasing SEND capacity in mainstream through Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs)	371	481	609	193	New ARP Places including the SEND Phase 2 Program
Increase in Special School Places	779	436	3,585	2,264	New Special School places

Financial Management

Administrative charges	125	185	185	185	Based on 0.5% of recoupment income forecast
Commissioning Arrangements	150	150	150	150	Based on outturn in previous years
DBV Initiative targeted support	266				
Total Mitigating Items	2,550	1,785	4,767	2,792	

Mitigated Cumulative (Deficit)/Surplus	(13,606)	(18,423)	(28,600)	(45,769)	Assumes 4.7% increase in income in 2027/28, 9% increase in expenditure and no Schools Block transfer
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Mitigated Best Case Scenario	(13,606)	(17,623)	(27,885)	(42,649)	Assumes 4.7% increase in income, 8% increase in expenditure, Schools Block transfer in 2027/28 & £200k alternative to ceased plans in 26/27 and 27/28
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Mitigated Worst Case Scenario	(13,606)	(18,423)	(29,070)	(47,725)	Assumes 4.7% increase in income, 10% increase in expenditure, no Schools Block transfer, no ceased plans, no administrative charges. Would be worse if Capital projects do not go ahead
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